Lai languages

The **Lai languages** or **Pawih/Pawi languages** are various Central Kuki-Chin-Mizo languages spoken by the Lai people or Pawi. They include *Laiholh* (Hakha-Chin) spoken around the Haka (Hakha/Halkha) capital of Chin State in Burma (Myanmar) and in the Lawngtlai district of Mizoram, India. In Bangladesh, a related language is spoken by the Bawm people. Likewise, Lai Mizo-Kuki-Chin includes Falam Lai (Laizo {Tlaisun-Hlawncheu}, Zahau {Tlauhmun-Khuangcheu} and Sim {Hauhulh-Thanhrang}, better known as Laitong. Other Lai languages are Mi-E (including Khuaksim), and the Zokhua dialect of Hakha spoken in Zokhua village.[2]

Lai languages are used mainly in central townships of Chin State which include Hakha, Falam, Matupi and Thantlang. Although Hakha Lai dialect is not a tonal language, it shares majority of the vocabularies with [[Falam language|Falam Lai]. Therefore, it is intelligible between Falam Lai and Hakha Lai. Falam Lai language is very close to its sibling Mizo language, chiefly used in Mizoram state India. Due to its closeness to the Mizo language, Falam Lai language vocabularies have been seen quite common in Mizo language. It is probably due to history that some of Mizo have been living in the west part of Chin State before they migrated to the current Mizoram. History also said that the Mizo language is derived from the Zahau (Lai) language.But actually Mizo is a mixture of Zo Hmar, Paite, Lai/Pawi, Mara/Lakher, Bawm, Thadou, Ralte, etc etc and many more. In fact, it was earliar known as Duhlian ţawng

Lai	
Native to	India, Myanmar, Bangladesh
Region	Mizoram, Chin State, Chittagong hills tract
Ethnicity	Lai people
Native speakers	210.410 (2017)
Language family	Sino-Tibetan ▪ Mizo-Kuki-Chin ▪ Central Kuki-Chin-Mizo languages ▪ **Lai**
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	`cnh`
Glottolog	`laic1236 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/laic1236)`[1]

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History

According to Thomas Han Tai, British soldier Lieutenant R. Steward Hudson developed the first writing system of Chin dialects in 1857 AD.

Lai language is written with the Roman alphabet. D.J.C. MacNabb, B.Sc., political officer in Haka, wrote the first Lai language writing handbook, "The Handbook of Haka or Baungshe Dialect of Chin Language," printed by Superintendent, Government Printing Press, Rangoon, in 1891. In 1894 Surgeon Major A.G.E

Newland (IMS) redeveloped the Lai writing system and published a book called "A Practical Hand Book of the Lais as spoken by the Hakas and other allied tribes of the Chin Hills (Commonly the Baungshe dialect)," printed by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1897. Later, the first Chin Hill missionaries Rev. Arthur E. Carson and Laura Carson arrived in Haka on 15 March 1899. With the arrival of Rev. Dr. Tilbe in 1900 in Haka, he and Rev. Arthur Carson researched the Lai writing system developed by Major A.G.E Newland. Still, the latest version of the Lai writing system was far from being perfection.

Examples of Lai writing system developed by Rev. Arthur Carson and Rev. Dr. Tilbe:

- Lai Relnak Tsa Ok
- A zhul Tu An Twa Hser Nak
- Hla Tsa Ok

In modern writing:

- Lai Relnak Cauk
- A Zultu An Tuahsernak

In 1908, Rev. Joseph Herbert Cope and his wife arrived in Haka city and revamped the Lai writing system. After Rev. Dr. Chester U Strait and his wife arrived in Haka in 1925, they upgraded the Hakha Lai writing system to almost perfection. Thus, when the last American Baptist Missionary Rev. Dr. Robert G. Johnson and his wife arrived in Haka in 1947, there were not many errors to fix and redevelop. Therefore, they translated the Holy Bible into Hakha Lai language in accordance with the Lai grammar finalized by Dr. Cope and Dr. Strait.

Falam Lai or Laizo or Laiţong or Zopau or Zotawng

The language used in Falam township is called "Laiţong" and is used as common media by the peoples of Lai tribes around Falam. It is currently used as the Chin official language in Myanmar indigenous radio broadcasting program. Falam Lai is regarded as the easiest dialect to learn in Chin State. The local peoples from Falam called it "Laiţong" where 'ţong' means 'language'.

The current official Chin language is Falam Lai dialect since the early 20th century. Though there are numerous dialects among the ethnic Chin, they all have links and similarities, which make them easy to understand each other. After studying several years on all the dialects among the Chins, the research concluded that the Falam Lai dialect has the commonest and the most understood language over all chin tribes including Mizos. It is recognized as the Chin official language with the British scholars and is learned throughout Falam areas until the junta disallowed to continue in the late 20th century. The common understanding of Falam Lai throughout Chin state could be partially be attributed to Falam's former reputation as capital and its important historical events such as the first public school in the entire Chin State was the No. 1 Basic Education High School in Falam. Before schools in other towns were established, residents from nearby towns would attend school here and adapt to Falam community, and subsequently learn the language. Still now, Falam Lai dialect is being practiced as official Chin language in Myanmar as in radio broadcasting.

Hakha Lai or Baungshe Language

The emergence of terminology of Hakha Lai is one of the reason where Lai language is more diversified than as known. **CACC** calls it Hakha station language. Unlike other dialects, Baungshe is not a tonal language. That's the reason why the accent or tone of Baungshe dialect speakers differs from township to township and village to village. Therefore, the orthography, phonology and some the vocabularies used in

one township may not be used in other townships. However, there is almost no discrepancy of vocabularies between Hakha Lai used in capital Haka / Hakha, Matupi and Thantlang townships. Matupi town has its own dialect known Matuholh or Matu Lai. It is the next kin of Hakha Lai. The Bible in Matu language has been successfully translated by Rev. Chan Thleng from Matupi. He is both expert in Matu and Hakha Lai. However, due to a very poor transportation and communication between Hakha and Matupi, the Hakha Lai influence and progress in Matupi is weak.

Academic Perspective of Lai

From an academic perspective, Falam Lai and Haka Lai are both Lai languages. Even with their linguistic variations, the languages should be studied together, because they are closely interrelated. Lai languages are probably the richest among dialects in the Chin State. Due to the research of Lai experts in the Chin State, a very interesting flow of adjectives and adverbs has been discovered, paving the way for a better understanding of Lai grammar. Despite this, much of the structure of these languages is still unknown, and they are still under debate by linguistic experts.

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